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1. An inflatable airbag cushion comprising:

a contact panel adapted to receive a vehicle occupant during a collision event;

a reaction panel adapted to abut a surface of a vehicle;

an deployment restraint system attached between the contact and reaction panels, the deployment restraint system being configured to restrict initial expansion of the airbag cushion toward a vehicle occupant in a first direction, the deployment restraint system including a releasable joint having a release trigger attached to a panel of the airbag cushion; and

wherein expansion of the airbag cushion in a second direction at an angle to the first direction of expansion actuates the release trigger, thus enabling the airbag cushion to expand to a fully-inflated state.

2. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 1, wherein the deployment restraint system comprises first and second tethers extending from the contact and reaction panels, respectively.

3. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 2, wherein the releasable joint of the deployment restraint system is formed using a linker selected from the group consisting of an adhesive, a hook-and-loop fastener, releasable stitching, frangible stitching, a heat weld, a friction weld, and a mechanical fastener.

4. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 3, wherein the release trigger is a third tether extending from the releasable joint and attached to a panel of the airbag cushion.

5. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 4, wherein the third tether of the release trigger is an extension of either the first or second tether of the deployment restraint system.

6. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 4, wherein the third tether of the release trigger is attached to the contact and reaction panels at a seam between the contact and reaction panels.

7. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 2, wherein the releasable joint of the deployment restraint system is formed using two mechanical interlinks joined by an intervening mechanical release trigger.

8. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 7, wherein the mechanical interlinks comprise loops extending from the contact and reaction panels of the airbag cushion, and wherein the mechanical release trigger comprises an intervening joining rod, wherein expansion of the airbag cushion in a second direction located at an angle to the first direction of expansion actuates the mechanical release trigger by causing withdrawal of the joining rod from the loops of the contact and reaction panels of the airbag cushion.

9. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 1, wherein the deployment restraint system comprises an expansion tether attached between the contact and reaction panels of the airbag cushion, wherein the expansion tether includes a releasable joint and a release trigger attached to a panel of the airbag cushion.

10. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 9, wherein the releasable joint is formed between a panel of the airbag cushion and the expansion tether such that inflation of the airbag cushion toward a vehicle occupant in a first direction of expansion extends the expansion tether and inflation of the airbag cushion in a second direction at an angle to the first direction of expansion actuates the release trigger.

11. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 10, wherein the releasable joint of the deployment restraint system is formed using a linker selected from the group consisting of an adhesive, a hook-and-loop fastener, releasable stitching, frangible stitching, a heat weld, a friction weld, and a mechanical fastener.

12. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 10, wherein the release trigger of the releasable joint is the panel of the airbag incorporated into the releasable joint of the deployment restraint system.

13. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 1, wherein the airbag cushion is selected from the group consisting of: steering wheel-mounted driver's side airbag cushions, dashboard-mounted passenger's side airbag cushions; overhead airbag cushions; pillar-mounted airbag cushions; knee bolsters; and inflatable curtain airbag cushions.

14. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 1, wherein the second direction of expansion is at an angle substantially perpendicular to the first direction of expansion.

15. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 14, wherein the second direction of expansion is downward relative to the first direction of expansion.

16. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 14, wherein the second direction of expansion is upward relative to the first direction of expansion.

17. An inflatable airbag cushion comprising:

a contact panel positioned to receive a vehicle occupant when deployed;

a reaction panel positioned to abut a vehicular surface when deployed;

a reaction tether having a first end extending from the reaction panel of the airbag cushion and a second end attached to a panel of the airbag cushion;

a limiting tether having a first end extending from the contact panel of the airbag cushion and a second end linked to an intermediate portion of the reaction tether with a releasable joint, wherein the inflated depth of the inflatable airbag cushion is initially limited during inflation by the reaction and limiting tethers until the inflatable airbag cushion has substantially reached a predetermined inflated breadth.

18. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 17, wherein the releasable joint linking the reaction tether and the limiting tether is formed using a joining method selected from the group consisting of: joining using an adhesive, joining using a hook-and-loop fastener, joining using releasable stitching, joining using frangible stitching, joining using a heat weld, joining using a friction weld, and joining using a mechanical fastener.

19. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 17, wherein the airbag cushion is selected from the group consisting of: steering wheel-mounted driver's side airbag cushions, dashboard-mounted passenger's side airbag cushions; overhead airbag cushions; pillar-mounted airbag cushions; knee bolsters; and inflatable curtain airbag cushions.

20. An inflatable airbag cushion comprising:

a contact panel positioned to receive a vehicle occupant when deployed;

a reaction panel positioned to abut a vehicular surface when deployed;

a limiting tether having a first end extending from the contact panel of the airbag cushion and a second end linked to the reaction panel with a releasable joint, wherein the inflated depth of the inflatable airbag cushion is initially limited during inflation by the limiting tether until the inflatable airbag cushion has substantially reached a predetermined inflated breadth.

21. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 20, wherein the releasable joint linking the limiting tether and the reaction panel is formed using a joining method selected from the group consisting of: joining using an adhesive, joining using a hook-and-loop fastener, joining using releasable stitching, joining using frangible stitching, joining using a heat weld, joining using a friction weld, and joining using a mechanical fastener.

22. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 20, wherein the airbag cushion is selected from the group consisting of: steering wheel-mounted driver's side airbag cushions, dashboard-mounted passenger's side airbag cushions; overhead airbag cushions; pillar-mounted airbag cushions; knee bolsters; and inflatable curtain airbag cushions.

23. An inflatable airbag cushion comprising:

a contact panel positioned to receive a vehicle occupant when deployed;

a reaction panel positioned to abut a vehicular surface when deployed;

a first loop extending from the contact panel of the airbag cushion and a second loop extending from the reaction panel, the first and second loops being interlinked by an intervening joining rod to restrain the expansion of the airbag cushion in a first expansion direction, wherein the joining rod has a first end stemming from a panel of the airbag cushion and a second end extending through the first and second loops;

wherein expansion of the airbag cushion in a second expansion direction at an angle to the first expansion direction withdraws the joining rod from the first and second loops, releasing the first and second loops.

24. The inflatable airbag cushion of claim 23, wherein the airbag cushion is selected from the group consisting of: steering wheel-mounted driver's side airbag cushions, dashboard-mounted passenger's side airbag cushions; overhead airbag cushions; pillar-mounted airbag cushions; knee bolsters; and inflatable curtain airbag cushions.